1: Wilson E-5 (1934-1938) 1951 FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTORY

a. The cultural area

THE Nyakyusa and Ngonde[1] are a Bantu-speaking people who live at the north-west corner of Lake Nyasa, on the marshy plain at the head of the Lake, and in the hills that rise steeply to the north and west of it. They straddle the Songwe river which divides Tanganyika from Nyasaland. The area is enclosed by the Lake itself, the escarpment of the Livingstone mountains on the north-east and the Poroto mountains on the north-west. To the west the boundaries are less clearly defined, but coincide pretty closely with the boundary of Rungwe district and with the watershed which separates Nyasaland from Northern Rhodesia. To the south the boundary is that of Chief Mwafulira's country, which lies some twenty miles south of Karonga (see Map I). Most of the area is thus situated between 9° and 10° S., and 33° and 34° E. It covers approximately 4,500 square miles and the population is about 235,000.[2]

Within this area there are local differences in language and custom. The dominant groups are the *Nyakyusa*, who live in Tanganyika on the Lake-shore plain and up into the hills as far as Rungwe mission, and the people of *Ngonde* who live on the Lake-shore plain in Nyasaland. These two groups speak dialects which, though differing somewhat in vocabulary and pronunciation, are easily understood by speakers from both, and their social structure is essentially similar. The main difference is that in Ngonde a

[1] The old men say *Nkhonde*, and the name appears in most of the literature as *Konde*.

[2] The area of Tukuyu district is 1,866 square miles, and the area subject to the Kyungu, the paramount chief of Ngonde, is 2,687 square miles. The Tanganyika census of 1931 gives the population of Rungwe district as 195,062: this was believed in the district to be an over-estimate. The population of Ngonde is approximately 40,000. For the southern boundary of the Ngonde people in 1881 see James Stewart, 'Lake Nyassa and the Water Route to the Lake Region of Central Africa', *Proceedings of the Royal Geographical Society, New Series*, Vol. III, 1881. He states that nine miles north of Mount Waller is a marsh; south of it are the Tumbuka, north of it the 'Chungu' (i.e. Ngonde).

1: Wilson E-5 (1934-1938) 1951 FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa

first-hand knowledge of them. On the coast they are classed with Nyakyusa and Ngonde as *Sokile*, a nickname derived from the traditional Nyakyusa greeting.

This book is concerned with the Nyakyusa.[1] What it contains is true in general terms for the people of Ngonde, but how far it is applicable to the smaller groups cited we are not certain. The Ndali, Sukwa, and Penja, are said to have long had an age-village organization; and Henga, Nyika and Kisi living intermingled with Ngonde and Nyakyusa have adopted it; but of the customs of the Wenya and Lambya we know little. Dr. Kerr Cross and Monteith Fotheringham, who travelled extensively in the area before 1890, reported that the Ndali and Sukwa (of Misuku) were very similar to the Nyakyusa and Ngonde people, but that the Lambya were different, practising shifting *citemene* cultivation, and living in stockaded villages.[2]

According to their own traditions the Nyakyusa and Ngonde chiefs (who trace descent from common ancestors) came ten generations ago from Kinga country, on the Livingstone mountains, and found the Rungwe and North Nyasa country already occupied. They established themselves as chiefs and have since been increasing the area of their occupation. The Kinga also affirm that their chiefs are related to those of the Nyakyusa and Ngonde, and they join with the Nyakyusa in sacrifice to common ancestors at Lubaga and LiKyala (see Map III), but the Kinga culture is quite distinct from that of the Nyakyusa and Ngonde; we stayed long enough in Kinga country to convince ourselves that the Kinga live in kinship villages and not in age-villages, and that they differ from the Nyakyusa in many other respects.

There seems little doubt that the Nyakyusa and Ngonde people have been expanding in an area not uninhabited, but sparsely inhabited, and that the assimilation of the Penja and other groups now proceeding is no new phenomenon, but part of a process which has long been going on. Within recent years over 2,000

[1] The Nyakyusa as here defined numbered 159,044 in Rungwe district at the 1931 census, and 3,732 outside the district; the Ndali 22,834, the Lambya (within Rungwe district, and not including those in Nyasaland) 12,403, and the Kisi (in Njombe district) 2,115. *Tanganyika Territory, Census of the Native Population*, 1931.

[2] D. Kerr-Cross, 'Geographical Notes on the Country between Lakes Nyassa, Rukwa, and Tanganyika, *The Scottish Geographical Magazine*, Vol. VI (1890), p. 286; L. M. Fotheringham, *Adventures in Nyassaland* (1891), pp. 129–33. Nyondo was a Lambya chief, cf. Godfrey Wilson, op. cit., p. 10.

1:Wilson E-5 (1934-1938)1951 FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa

from the Inamwanga and Iwa to the north-west and the Henga to the south. The affinities of the Inamwanga and Iwa appear to be with the Mambwe,[1] while the Henga are an offshoot of the Tumbuka-Kamanga people who took refuge from the Ngoni in Ngonde.[2] Of the Phoka who live high up in the hills south-west of Ngonde we know almost nothing, except that they are skilled cultivators, and their language is closely related to Tumbuka.

The cultural group consisting of the Nyakyusa and Ngonde people, together with small groups in Rungwe district and Ngonde largely absorbed by them, and including the Nyakyusa immigrants in Mbeya district, probably numbers about a quarter of a million.

Of the more distant cultural affinities of this group we know nothing: there are no consistent similarities in culture between it and any other known group. The elaborate age-organization, and the great ceremony of handing over secular power to the next generation, which is held every thirty years or so, suggest East African connections, while the girls' puberty and marriage ceremony (*ubusungu*) is in many ways similar to the *cisungu* ceremony of the Bemba;[3] and the witchcraft beliefs are like those of the Azande[4] and the Lovale.[5]

b. Environment and economy

The Nyakyusa-Ngonde country is fertile, well watered and, to European eyes, spectacularly beautiful, with its arc of high mountains and sparkling lakes. The Nyakyusa valley forms part of the

[1] F. F. R. Boileau and L. A. Wallace, 'The Nyasa-Tanganyika Plateau', *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. XIII (1899); J. C. C. Coxhead, 'The Native Tribes of North-Eastern Rhodesia, their Laws and Customs', *Royal Anthropological Institute, Occasional Paper*, No. 5, 1914; C. Goldsbury and H. Sheane, *The Great Plateau of Northern Rhodesia* (1911).

[2] F. D. Lugard, *The Rise of our East African Empire* (1893), Vol. I, p. 52; M. Sanderson, 'Some Marriage Customs of the WaHenga, Nyasaland', *Journal of the African Society*, Vol. XXII (1922–3); T. Cullen Young, 'The WaHenga of North Nyasaland', *Journal of the African Society*, Vol. XXIII (1923–4); 'Tribal Intermixture in Northern Nyasaland', *J.R.A.I.*, Vol. LXIII (1933); 'Habits and Customs of the Olden Days among the Tumbuka-Kamanga People', *Bantu Studies*, Vol. X (1936).

[3] A. I. Richards, *Bemba Marriage and Present Economic Conditions*, Rhodes-Livingstone Papers, No. 4. (1940).

[4] E. E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic among the Azande* (1937).

[5] C. M. N. White, 'Witchcraft, Divination and Magic among the Balovale Tribes', *Africa*, Vol. XVIII (1948), pp. 81–104.

1:Wilson E-5 (1934-1938) 1951 FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa

133 Great Rift valley, walled in on the east by the Livingstone mountains, which rise to 10,000 feet, and on the west by the rather lower Ndali hills. It is blocked to the north-west by Rungwe volcano and the Poroto mountains; the volcano rises from the floor of the Rift to nearly 10,000 feet, and the lowest pass over the Poroto mountains is 8,000 feet. Scattered throughout the hills are a number of small lakes formed in the craters of old volcanoes, each one like a jewel set in the green of field and pasture.

132 The rainfall in this valley is very heavy, averaging over 100 inches in the year, and innumerable streams rush down the ●161 mountain slopes, flooding parts of the plain during the torrential rains of March and April. The dry season is short—it scarcely exists in the hills—and such a rainfall, combined with skilful cultivation and stock-breeding, makes a large population possible. The average density for Rungwe district is over eighty persons to the square mile; the population is most concentrated on the Lake-shore plain, but stretches up into the hills to 6,000 feet. South of the Songwe the rainfall is much less—at Karonga it averages only 45 inches a year—and the country supports a smaller population, the average density for Ngonde being less than fifteen persons to the square mile.

The Nyakyusa grow a variety of crops of which the chief are 24 bananas and plantains, finger millet, maize, cow-peas, coco-yams, cassava, sweet potatoes, ground-nuts, curcurbits and, recently, rice [231] and coffee. They also breed short-horned, humped, cattle which are carefully stalled at night, and hand-dressed to keep them free from ticks. Banana plantations stretch mile upon mile through the plain and along the crests of the ridges.[1] In them are hidden the villages, often so close together that the boundaries between them are not obvious. On the fringes of the bananas are the tilled fields, and beyond the fields the open pasture land. Unlike most of their neighbours in Central Africa the Nyakyusa practise fixed, not shifting, cultivation, and the land is kept in good heart by green manuring, rotation of crops, and periodic fallows.[2] Only in the cultivation of finger millet, cow-peas, and pumpkins,

[1] J. F. Elton, *The Lakes and Mountains of Eastern and Central Africa* (1879), pp. 330–1, and D. Kerr-Cross, op. cit., pp. 285–6, comment on their great extent.

[2] According to the Nyakyusa themselves the productivity of their fields is slowly diminishing. Most of them attribute this to the neglect of traditional rituals. We do not know how far their observations are objective, and how far they are biased by the tendency to glorify the past. D. H. Thwaites, in his article

4: Tew E-4 (no date) 1950 FN17 Ngonde FN17

175 to take up arms and lead the people to fight. The Ngoni were temporarily beaten off, but at a later attack the Ngonde, under Gwa Ilapasi, submitted. By 1875 he had been succeeded by Mwafongo, who was Kyungu at the time of the first visit of the Europeans. By that time, Arab slave- and ivory-traders had established themselves in Ngonde, and for the next twenty years they disputed the territory with the Europeans. After Dr. Law's voyage to Ngonde in 1875 a Free Church of Scotland Mission station and a post of the African Lakes Corporation were set up at Karonga. The Arabs sometimes traded with the Ngonde and sometimes fought them. In one fight the Kyungu Mwafongo was killed and Mwabulambo was elected in his place. The agent of the African Lakes Corporation tried to protect the people against the Arabs, and barely succeeded in maintaining his own position, until in 1889 H. H. Johnston made treaties with the chiefs and Arabs in Ngonde, and the country came into the sphere of influence of the British South Africa Company. In 1895 Mlozi, the leading Arab, who had not accepted British rule, was caught and hanged, and Ngonde was incorporated in the British Protectorate of Central Africa.

The inter-territorial boundary between Nyasaland and German East Africa (now Tanganyika Territory) cut across the area of the Kyungu's influence, which used to extend some fifteen miles north of the Songwe river, and some of the western territories were included in Northern Rhodesia.

The new government forbade elephant hunting without licence, and so killed the ivory trade, a main source of revenue; taxes were collected, and small subsidies paid out of them to selected chiefs and nobles. Mwakabaga, who became Kyungu in 1904, was the first Kyungu to sit with his people judging their cases. After his death the nobles chose Mwangalaba to succeed him, and in his reign the custom of hoeing (*milaso*) for the Kyungu lapsed till 1927, when it was revived in a modified form by the next Kyungu, Peter. The latter was the younger brother of Mwangalaba, and acted as his assistant in 1912 and as regent in 1927, succeeding to the full position of Kyungu in 1932. He had made a private fortune in industry and used it consistently to maintain his public position. He left Mbande, the traditional capital which had been dominated by the nobles of Ngonde, and built a new one at Bwiba, half-way between Mbande and the government Boma at Karonga.[1]

DEMOGRAPHY

•161 *Ngonde.* In 1931 the Ngonde population had increased from 18,852 in 1921 to 30,731, or by 63 per cent. In 1945 it again doubled itself, reaching the figure of 62,136. The average density in the district is under fifteen per square mile.[2]

Nyakyusa country is thickly populated in the south around the lake-shore plain. Its density is about six times as great as that of Ngonde country.[3]

161 In recent years there has been a large movement of Nyakyusa from Rungwe district
166 into Mbeya district, into the areas e[illegible] west of Mbeya, where the average density is over 100 persons to the square mile, [illegible]th a maximum of over 400 to the square mile in one village near Mbeya.[4]

[1] Wilson, 5. 1939, pp. 67-9; Mackenzie, 1925, pp. 27-4; Maugham, 2. 1900, pp. 7 and 134-41; Livingstone, 1921, pp. 277 sq.; Laws, 1934, pp. 100 sq.; Du Plessis, 1929, pp. 296-322; Johnston, 1897 pp. 72-6; Legard, 1895, vol. i, pp. 42 sq., and 131-2; Duff, 1903, p. 10.

[2] *1931* and *1945 Census*, p. 15.

[3] *Handbook of German East Africa*, p. 68; Wilson, 5. 1939, p. 7.

[4] Hall, 1945.

4: Tew E-4 (no date) 1950 FN17 Ngonde FN17

The *Nyamwanga* and *Isu* of Abercorn and Mazama districts, Northern Rhodesia, are in areas where the density is between 4 and 7 per square mile, and they number less than 20,000.[1]

Tanganyika Peoples[2]

Tribe	District	Total population	Total children	Percentage of children to adults	Percentage of males to females		Increase since 1931
					Adults	Children	
Kukwe	Rungwe	68,197	50,834	74	51	110	..
Seria	Mbeya	10,755	..	..	..	..	..
Nyakyusa	Rungwe	80,092	37,799	..	..	..	..
	Mbeya	2,057	1,030	..	..	..	..
	Other districts	775	551	87	57	100	34.176

Populations of less than 50,000 Persons

Tribe	District	Total population
Kinga	Njombe	27,036
Lambya	Rungwe	12,403
Ndali	Rungwe	22,834
Nyamwanga	Mbeya	10,147
Nyika	Mbeya and Ufipa	25,170
Pangwa	Njombe	20,533
Wanji	Njombe	20,397
Wanda	Mbeya and Ufipa	5,754

LINGUISTIC DATA

According to Doke's classification *Ngonde* is one of the five important languages of the east central sub-zone of Bantu languages, and is spoken in Tanganyika to the north end of Lake Nyasa, where it is known as *Nyakyusa*.[3] In language as well as culture, the Ngonde of Nyasaland are identical with the Nyakyusa of Tanganyika.[4] According to Guthrie's classification, many of the tribes, whose affiliation is not known on cultural or historical grounds, may be attached, on linguistic grounds, to speakers of the Tumbuka group of languages: *Wenya*, *Lambia*, and *Wandia*.[5]

PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

The *Kinga* inhabit the inaccessible heights of the north and west portion of the Livingstone mountains, which rise to 10,000 ft.[6]

Nyakyusa country is bounded on the south by Lake Nyasa and the Songwe river, on the east by the wall of the Livingstone range, and on the west by the Ndali hills. They live between the two walls of the Great Rift valley. In the north the rift is interrupted and closed by the extinct volcano Rungwe (10,000 ft.), from whose base the land drops in hills and little plateaux to the lake-shore plain. The soil is not very rich,

[1] Orde Brown, 1, 1938, maps.
[2] *Census of the Native Population*, 1931, Tables VI and VII.
[3] Wilson, 5, 1939, p. 8.
[4] Du Plessis, 1929, p. 323.
[5] Doke, 1945, p. 66.
[6] Guthrie, 1948, p. 81.

5:Wilson E-5 (1934-1938)1938 FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa

131 twenty miles from Lake Nyasa (1,500 feet). A little compact country,
133 secluded until very recently from any effective external contacts, slightly over 1,000 square miles in extent.[1]

132 The soil, particularly that of the higher ground in the north of the Nyakyusa country, is not in itself very rich, but, as between 100 and 130
134 inches of rain usually fall each year, the district is one of the most fertile
●[161] in the whole of Tanganyika; two crops a year are often grown on the same patch of ground, and the African population is over eighty to the square
[231] mile. There is no infected tsetse fly and cattle are the most prized possession of the Nyakyusa.

631 For historical reasons, which we will discuss in a later section, the Nyakyusa have never been united under any one paramount chief of their own, but live in a number (nearly 100 at the present day) of tiny but traditionally independent chiefdoms. For these chiefdoms the numerous streams which run down from the north into Lake Nyasa and the crests of the ridges of land between them, form natural boundaries.

133 The country, of course, is not all of equal economic value, parts of it are stony and mountainous, other parts, and particularly the plain in the
134 south, consist of deep and level soil; and the population is heavier on the plain than on the higher ground. Further, on the higher ground, there exist numerous old volcanic craters filled with rich moist soil and these, being more fertile than the surrounding land, are particularly valued by
[244] the Nyakyusa. Again, of the two chief economic crops of this district, one, coffee, can only be grown on the higher ground while the other, rice, can only be grown on or near the plain. And at every point their system of land tenure is partially determined by such physical factors as these.

3. *THE USES AND VALUE OF LAND*

311 The Nyakyusa use their land for building on, for agriculture, for pasture, for hunting and fishing; they collect firewood, reeds, thatching-grass, mushrooms and other wild vegetables there; they draw water from its streams and bathe daily in them; on their land they grow bamboos, bananas, *imiyuguti* trees[2] and coffee; they keep bees; they dance, they fight, they walk and lie down upon it; their land is both the receptacle of refuse and the location of religious ritual, while their doctors continually wander over its surface in search of magical medicines.

Not all these uses of land give rise to laws, moral rules or conventions, but only those uses which tend to lead men into conflict with one another or into mutual embarrassment. The only reasons for the existence of

---

[1] The whole of Rungwe District is 1,866 square miles, but this includes the hills of the Ndali and Lambya as well.

[2] I have not been able to discover the botanical name of this tree.

6:Wilson E-5 (1934-1938)1939 FN17 Ngonde FN17

THE CONSTITUTION OF NGONDE.

1. *A COMPARATIVE PROBLEM.*

Ngonde is a district at the north end of Lake Nyasa; its centre is fixed, its boundaries vague. The centre of Ngonde is the sacred hill Mbande which stands in a bend of the Lukulu River eight miles from the lake. Here is the traditional home of the Kyungus, the paramount chiefs of Ngonde.[1] But its boundaries cannot be so easily defined. A man moving from any direction and almost any distance towards Mbande will say he is going "to Ngonde." One man may start five miles from Mbande and proceed to its base, another may, in the north at least, start far away among the Nyakyusa in Tanganyika and stop fifteen miles short of the Songwe, where alone the Kyungu's supremacy begins to be effective, and yet both alike say they are going "to Ngonde." But in this paper the name Ngonde is used to refer to the area of the Kyungu's present political paramountcy alone, an area defined in the north by the Songwe River, which is also the boundary between Nyasaland and Tanganyika, in the east by Lake Nyasa, in the west by the Nyasaland—Northern Rhodesia boundary and in the south by the borders of Chief Mwafulira's country some twenty-five miles from Mbande; an area of 2,687 square miles. |3|

The population of Ngonde, thus defined, is 40,000, with a density of just under fifteen to the square mile; while the rainfall averages 45" per annum. It is thus very different from the country of the Nyakyusa across the Songwe, where the average rainfall is more than twice and the density of population about six times as great. |6| |32|

The people of Ngonde are not homogeneous in language and culture. The dominant group lives on the strip of plain which stretches along the shores of the Lake, north and south from Mbande, and the district is here referred to as "the plain," "the Ngonde plain" or "Ngonde proper." Behind them, in the hills which rise westwards to the borders of Northern Rhodesia, live small groups of Lambya, Sukwa, Wenya, Henga and Mambwe. They, while politically subordinate to the Kyungu, differ considerably from the inhabitants of Ngonde proper in their ways of life and speech. These upland groups we did not visit and, unless the contrary is specifically stated, all references here to the culture or customs of Ngonde should be taken to refer to the plain alone. |0|

---

[1] I use the forms Kyungu, Ngonde, Mbande now used by the young men and officially accepted. The old men speak of Chungu, Nkhonde, Mphande.

8: Wilson E-5 (1934-1936)1936 FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa

128 as they do, in their behaviour and their mutual relationships to a common type. Space forbids such an undertaking here; and it is necessary to emphasise that, although the most significant facts are described in an orderly manner, and although certain reasons for these facts are indicated in their specific character and in their connections with one another, yet these reasons are not fully or systematically worked out, and the result is a description which leaves the facts only half-explained. And, in so far as this society is not here fully analysed, so it is not yet fully comparable with others. The reader of this paper will detect many points of similarity and of difference between Nyakyusa society and some other with which he is familiar, but the comparison cannot be made to yield any propositions about the nature of human societies in general until the facts of both have been fully explained in terms of their particular social, cultural, and external conditions.

Climate, Cultural Groups, and European Contact.

101 The Nyakyusa live in the Rungwe District of South Tanganyika in
131 the Rift Valley at the head of Lake Nyasa. The valley is dominated and
133 closed at its North end by the recently extinct Rungwe volcano, from whose foot the land, starting as an upland plateau 5,000 ft. above sea-level tumbles southwards for twenty-five miles in a broken cascade of hills, to level out in a plain fifteen or twenty miles from Lake Nyasa. The Lake is 1200 ft. above the sea. The East wall of the Rift rises to 10,000 ft. or more in the peaks of the Livingstone Mountains, but the West wall is two or three thousand feet lower. The climate is very wet, for about 130" of
[132] rain fall each year, and, at 9° South of the Equator, is also very hot.
[161 The rain and the sun together make the land extremely fertile; the
73] district is thickly populated (over 100 to the square mile), famine is rare and the Nyakyusa are far better fed than most of their neighbours. Rice
177 was introduced into the plain by Arabs, coffee by the German Missiona-
241 ries in the hills, and these two crops to-day, under the enthusiastic care and guidance of the Government Agricultural Department, bring to many Nyakyusa a small but steadily increasing cash income.

262 Their main foods are bananas, maize, beans, sweet potatoes and a
241 variety of greenstuffs, together with meat and curds from their cattle. Millet is extensively grown and is used both for making beer and for eating in the form of porridge.

101 The name *Nyakyusa* is nowadays used by themselves as a general name for all those who have similar speech and customs and who live in Tanganyika; but formerly it only covered those who live in the South of the district, in the plain and up in the hills as far North as the administra-

8:Wilson E-5 (1934-1936)1936 FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa

tive capital, Tukuyu, and it is still thus used to distinguish this group 101
from others. This group will here be referred to as "*Nyakyusa proper*." These in the North of the district to the West and East of Mount Rungwe call themselves *Kukwe* and *Mwamba* respectively, and there is a group of chiefdoms to the East, under the Livingstone Mountains, called *Selya*. All these four groups share a common culture, distinguished by minor [184]
local peculiarities of dialect and custom. Immediately bordering the Nyakyusa to the South West are the *Ngonde* (Europeanized as "*Konde*") in Northern Nyasaland; they belong to the same cultural group but are distinguished by greater differences of custom and speech than the others. I have not yet visited them.

In the hills to the West of the Rift live the *Ndali*, who are included in this administrative district; and on the plateau under these hills, to the West of the Kukwe, live the *Penja*. Both these small groups have old languages of their own which, though related to that of the Nyakyusa are [197]
more or less unintelligible to them; and they have equally distinct cultures. But they are now rapidly being assimilated to the Nyakyusa both in [177]
speech and in law.

I use the name Nyakyusa, in accordance with modern usage, to include the Nyakyusa proper, the Kukwe, Mwamba, and Selya groups, but to exclude the Ndali, the Penja, and the Konde. The Nyakyusa together with the Ndali and Penja number 150,000; the Konde of Nyasa- [161] ●
land 30,000.*

Members of the Berlin and Moravian Missions were the first Euro- 797
peans to settle in the district, where they have lived now for forty-five 177
years and have made numerous converts. The German Administrators followed them closely, and later came a few planters. But pronounced economic change is a matter of the past five to ten years during which time the Lupa Gold Fields of South Tanganyika have been opened up and have employed increasing numbers of Africans on the diggings. During the past few years the young men of the Nyakyusa have developed [166
the habit of going for a few months, now and again, to the Gold Fields to 464]
earn money for tax and clothes. They seldom stay more than six months at a time, often only one or two; so that their absence does not cause the same difficulties in their own community that are found in other areas where the men spend longer periods away from home.

The Family, together with a sketch of wider Kinship Groupings

The relationships of husband and wife, parent and child, sibling and 593
sibling are continually visible in the culture of the Nyakyusa. The

---

*Government Census figures.

8:Wilson E-5 (1934-1936)1936 FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa

kinsman. Though some of the reasons for his subordination are to be found in modern conditions, it is clear that many of the factors have always operated. 622

Wars did not only occur between brothers; but when one chief defeated another who was more distantly related to him, he did not, apparently ever, reduce him to a minor position: He either took his cows and then left him alone, or killed him and set up a brother of his own as an independent though allied chief, or else, more rarely, killed him, took over the country and directly incorporated it in his own. So that, apart from the subordination of a defeated brother and his heirs, political authority always stopped at the boundaries of each separate chiefdom.[18] 622 727

The traditionally independent chiefdoms to-day vary in numbers from 100 to about 3,000 adult men. 631 161

The coming of the German Administration in 1893 introduced a paramount political authority, for the first time, in the persons of European officials; while in 1926, a generation later, the British Administration created new Native Authorities under the District Officer and superior to the chiefs. The traditionally independent chiefs were grouped together in eleven court districts, in each district a "Native Court" was set up, consisting of the various chiefs and their great commoners, under the hereditary presidency of one of the chiefs, who thereby became senior to all the others in that court district. Salaries for chiefs have been introduced, and the senior chiefs receive far higher salaries than the others; while the meetings of each Court are always held in the territory of the senior chief (*omalafyale oyholumba*); and to it has now been transferred a great deal of the legal business which, before 1926, was transacted by each chief sitting with his own great commoners in his own chiefdom. The chiefs themselves were consulted in the selection of the Court Presidents, and those chosen were normally the chiefs with the greatest number of men in each particular court district. 636 177 [465]

In this account the term *senior chief* (*omalafyale oyholumba*) denotes the President of a Native Court, *chief* (*omalafyale*) means one of the traditionally independent chiefs, while *minor chief* (*omalafyale omundi*) means one of the subordinate chiefs, often with only 40-60 men under him.

The introduction of Courts and salaries has brought an entirely new element into the relationship between old and young chiefs (*vide* 636 177 578

[18] Among the Konde of Nyasaland, I am told, there was a paramount chief Kyungu, with a far-reaching political authority; but there was no such chief among the Nyakyusa.

9: Wilson E-5 (1934-1955) 1959
FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa

177 in similar schools in 1958. Less than 40 per cent of the children
[872] between eight and eleven years old[1] are as yet in school in Rungwe District and the demand for places is enormous. Among the most insistent are girls wanting education. During the 1930's the Education Department was trying, with little success,
[871] to coax girls to stay in school long enough to learn to read and write, but today nearly a third of the primary school pupils are girls. A handful of boys and girls go out of the district to attend
[874] middle or secondary schools, and a few candidates for training as teachers and district nurses come in. Thus an educated person, or one who goes out to work, mixes with people whose backgrounds and languages are quite different from his own.

[511] Then people are richer than they used to be, partly because of the wages earned abroad, and partly because of the coffee and
[445] rice grown and exported. There is also some employment within the district on tea estates (especially important to women and girls), and coal and vermiculite mines. The value of peasant crops
[434] exported has risen from about £24,000 in 1936[2] to nearly £578,000 from coffee and rice alone in 1955,[3] and some men have made as much as £150 from their coffee in a year. A coffee cheque of £50 to £60 is common. In addition to the peasant crops there is tea from estates—well over a million pounds of made tea in 1955 as well as a quantity of seed. This increase in wealth has involved a change in the division of labour. Because men are not at home to clear and hoe, their wives, perforce, must clear fields and hoe for themselves, assisted by their young sons, boys who twenty years ago would not yet have stopped herding.

[161] There has been a rapid increase in population, more especially in the hills, due partly to the development of health services and

[1] Number of children in Mission and Native Authority schools in Rungwe District, 1955:

Boys	Girls	Total	No. of children 8-11 years of age (estimated as 10% of total population)
6,550	2,054	8,648	23,639
Middle Schools			
718	73	791	(This total does not include those who are in middle schools outside the District, nor does it include those following a professional course in the District)

(Figures provided by the courtesy of the Provincial Education Officer, Mbeya.)
Change in Ngonde is not discussed for it was not possible to visit that area in 1955.

[2] *Good Company*, p. 18.

[3] Calculated from figures kindly supplied by the District Commissioner, Mr. Peter Johnston.

9: Wilson E-5 (1934-1955) 1959
FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa

partly to the closer spacing of children. Whereas four years between births was conventional formerly, two or less is now usual. One of the characteristics of the present population is a disproportion between the sexes, the females outnumbering the males by 100 to 87·9 even when due allowance has been made for men away at work.[1] This disproportion is characteristic also of African populations in the south[2] and it appears likely that it is due to a wide difference in the survival rate of men and women, but the vital statistics necessary to test this hypothesis are lacking.

The increase in population, and the demand for coffee gardens and rice fields by men who prefer to earn cash by agriculture rather than as migrant labourers, has led to a shortage of land, already acute in the fertile lake-shore plain, and imminent in the coffee-growing villages of the hills.[3] Much land that was previously pasture land has been taken into cultivation, and signs of overstocking are everywhere apparent. Hillsides that in 1938 were covered with grass, waist high, now have a thin stubble. To aggravate matters, the care of stock is less efficient than it used to be because it is left to very small boys, their seniors being occupied with school and hoeing. Often the cattle are both ill nourished and covered with ticks—something that was never seen when they were herded by adolescents and carefully hand-dressed. The villagers themselves are as much concerned as the agricultural officers over the shortage of pasture and the decrease in the milk supply, but they are not prepared to accept the remedies recommended: namely, reduction of stock and stall-feeding. The advice of Europeans on the growing of rice and coffee crops, which they introduced to the district, is acceptable, but the Nyakyusa argue

[1] The Census figures cannot be taken as exact, but they give some indication of the increase in population, and the disproportion between men and women. In 1931 the population of Rungwe District was given as 195,062. In 1948 it was 276,388. In 1931 the proportion of males to females (Kukwe and Nyakyusa in Rungwe district) was 73·6 : 100 (Tanganyika Territory, *Census of the Native Population 1931*). In 1948 the figure for Tukuyu district as a whole was 80 : 100 (Tanganyika Territory, *East African Population Census, 1948*). Allowing for 8,800 men away without wives (estimate for 1954 low 10 per cent), the proportion is 87·9 : 100 (cf. P. H. Gulliver, Report on the Migration of African Workers to the South from the Southern Highland Province, with special Reference to the Nyakyusa of Rungwe District, February 1955, p. 18). The discrepancy in the figures given for adults was 62·2 : 100 in 1948, but the ages of males and females classed as 'adult' are uncertain.

[2] D. H. Houghton and E. M. Walton, *The Economy of a Native Reserve*, Keiskammahoek Rural Survey, vol. ii, pp. 24-6, 31. The sex ratio for Keiskammahoek District is 73·6 males : 100 females.

[3] cf. P. H. Gulliver, *Nyakyusa Land and Population*, 1956.

9: Wilson E-5 (1934-1955) 1959
FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa

177 that they have always been cattle men and they need no instruc-
[232] tion on cattle. The tension over stock limitation and soil con-
[242] servation, so acute in many parts of Africa, is only just appearing in Rungwe district, but potentially it is serious.

Pressure on land, and the planting of a valuable long-term crop
[311] such as coffee, have undermined the traditional organization of
[361] age-villages. The old men are no longer prepared to move to make way for their sons and, without a new deal in land each
[161] generation, the territorial separation of the generations is blurred. Boys villages are no longer visible in the hills near Rungwe mission, partly because so many young men are away, either at school or in employment, but largely because most of the land is taken up with coffee gardens. Homesteads are being built farther apart as men lay out coffee round their houses, and sons often build on a corner of their father's estate instead of in a separate village. On the plain, also, the pressure of population blurs the boundaries between generations. Only in the least heavily populated middle belt are numerous boys' villages still clearly visible, and here too a 'coming out' has recently been celebrated, with some redistribution of land. The scarcest land, that in old volcanic craters, was always inherited, like cattle, not reallocated each generation, and almost all cultivated land is now treated in this way. In many chiefdoms, therefore, a young man looks to his father or senior brother for land, rather than to the village head-
[428] man, and inheritance is supremely important. But the form of inheritance is changing: property now goes directly from father to son, not as formerly to each of a group of full brothers before reverting to the senior son of the eldest of them. The claims of more distant kinsmen on inherited stock are less than they used to be; such stock becomes the exclusive property of father and sons, *rather than property in which members of a lineage of three or*
[613] *four generations* have reciprocal rights. The main economic bond which held the lineage together, the exchange of cattle, is thus broken.

Formerly a marriage was a contract between lineages rather
[583] than between individuals. A girl was betrothed before puberty to a
[581] man of her father's choice and should he die she was still regarded as married to his heir. Should she die a sister replaced her. Ideally a marriage bond between lineages lasted for generations, each man who died being replaced by a brother or son, each woman by a sister or brother's daughter. The choice of a partner in marriage

10:Gulliver E-5 (1954-1955) 1958 F317 Ngonde F317
Nyakyusa

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

I

In many areas of Eastern Africa the pressure of peasant populations on their tribal lands is a critical feature of the contemporary scene, and this is most especially so in the more fertile parts where the African has accepted the new cash economy and is beginning to appreciate the potentialities of the modern world. The situation has been highlighted recently in the public mind by the publication of the Report of the East African Royal Commission[1] which examined the economic conditions of our time and made general recommendations.

In Tanganyika the overall density of population is low (22 persons per square mile) and the general scale of economic activity still remains little above subsistence level over vast areas of Territory. There are, however, islands of extremely dense populations scattered through the country, often associated with the mountain areas, where soil is fertile, rainfall is reliable and adequate and the cultivation of crops for sale in world markets has gone ahead fairly easily. These populations still comprise peasant farming communities with little capital and their "natural" impulse is to expand their extensive agricultural system rather than to intensify their cultivation on existing holdings. Serious overcrowding soon results for the favourable areas are limited and surrounded by drier bushlands. African attitudes and legal customs concerning their land do not change quickly and they lag behind new conditions of physical limitation and economic development. Whilst the recommendations of the Royal Commission may be valuable in the establishment of general policy, it is obvious that detailed application through time demands a fairly exact knowledge and understanding of particular local conditions if it is to be reasonably successful. This is particularly the case in so large a country as Tanganyika, with its multiplicity of environments and tribal systems of law, land tenure and agriculture, and the social attitudes which encompass them.

The present essay is an attempt, sponsored by Government, to describe and analyse the land and population conditions in one small area of the Territory where a cash economy is emerging and where the pressure of a peasant population on its land resources has become acute. It is hoped that some of this account may be applicable, *mutatis mutandis*, to other similar areas both in Tanganyika and elsewhere, and that the conclusions reached may be helpful in dealing with the problems there; but primarily this is a study of one particular part of the country in order to provide the information upon which detailed policy may be founded.

The Nyakyusa are not entirely typical of many of the Bantu people of East Africa for they have a most distinctive social organization, peculiar to themselves, based on age-villages and party, independent chiefdoms. Also, they inhabit a country whose annual rainfall is immensely high, averaging about 100 inches. On the other hand, these people are one of the very few in Tanganyika for whom we have an excellent account of both their pre-European and early European systems of land tenure. Based on this information, obtained before modern changes began, we can perceive, analyse

1. East African Royal Commission 1953-5, Report. H.M.S.O. 1955. Cmd. 9475.

and try to understand the nature and reasons for change. Here, then, is a good opportunity for the study of social change – not only in land tenure as such, but also in village and family organisation, political authority and economic life.

II

The Nyakyusa are a Bantu people inhabiting the main part of the Rungwe District in southern Tanganyika, immediately to the north of Lake Nyasa. In 1948 they numbered about 199,000 in that District, but about 10,000 men were probably at the time temporarily absent from their homes and in employment in the mines and towns of the Rhodesias and South Africa (see Gulliver, 1957), whilst about 20,000 had migrated to live in the adjacent Mbeya District to the north.

The tribal area comprises a confined geographical basin surrounding the northern end of Lake Nyasa. It extends only about 40 miles from the tip of the lake at 1,550 feet above sea level to the Poroto Mountains in the north at 8,000 feet; and from east to west is only about 30 miles, from the almost sheer walls of the Livingstone Mountains (with peaks up to 10,000 feet) to the Ndali Highlands (rising to about 7,000 feet). There are therefore unusually large ecological differences within so small an area. Three major regions are to be distinguished: the "Northern Highlands" over about 4,500 feet, the low-lying "Lake Plains" in the south, and the "Central Region" in between. Everywhere rainfall is reliable and high, averaging at least 100 inches annually[1], and this amply compensates for a certain poverty and misuse of the soil, although (and particularly in the Central Region) it brings dangers of soil erosion. Except in the highest parts the banana is the staple food, supported by maize, beans, finger millet and groundnuts. In the Northern Highlands coffee has become well established as the principal cash crop: in the Lake Plains paddy rice cultivation provides both a food and a cash crop: in the Central Region the country is too low generally for coffee and too high and dry for rice; consequently cash-cropping is considerably inferior and the people's standard of living is rather poorer.

The Nyakyusa and their country tended for a long time to be relatively isolated from the outside world by high mountain walls and rain-soaked roads. In addition, or because of it perhaps, they developed an almost unique culture which was supported by considerable conservatism and high insularity. They still continue to regard their African neighbours beyond the mountains as their social and cultural inferiors. The turmoil of the slave-trade in Central Africa passed them by; in modern times they have not enthusiastically accepted Christianity and they have refused to take up the use of Swahili, the Territorial *lingua franca*. In recent years, and most especially since the end of World War II, they have, however, accepted and pushed forward with vigour a rapid and extensive economic development, involving particularly the production of coffee and paddy as cash crops, and large-scale labour migration to the south in the high-wage mining industries. The multiplicity of petty, often tiny, independent chiefdoms has been reorganised to provide four local government areas, each under a Rural Council, in which the old chiefdoms have become something like parishes[2]. Although much of the old conservatism and narrow parochialism persists, yet there is now an atmosphere of accepted change, of a keen desire for economic development, and a general acceptance of a cash economy.

Probably the most significant feature of modern life in the Nyakyusa country is the increasing scarcity of land for agriculture in relation to the

1. At Tukuyu, in the Northern Highlands, annual rainfall averaged [illegible] inches between [illegible] and [illegible]; at Kyela, in the Lake Plains, the average between [illegible] and [illegible] was [illegible] inches.
2. See Kingdon, E.E.: The extension of a system of local government by African rural councils in the Rungwe District, Tanganyika; *The Journal of African Administration*, [illegible], 4, October, [illegible].

10:Culliver E-5 (1954-1955) 1958 FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa

people's needs. The importance of this can scarcely be overemphasised for a peasant people who are adopting a cash economy and are socially and emotionally deeply attached to their land – their single, continuous source of capital and their tribal heritage. Apart from the possibilities of labour migration which, so far at any rate, are taken up only temporarily and by the younger men, there are no economic opportunities and no capital to compete with the land. In non-economic life the land remains supreme as the persisting basis of society.

As late as 1940 the District Commissioner, Rungwe, was able to write that there was most generally sufficient land for the people's needs in all parts of the country, and the only competition was perhaps in respect of the very best and most fertile tracts, as had always been the case. G. Wilson recorded similar remarks in the late nineteen-thirties. That these observations were correct cannot be doubted. It is known, for instance, that until the post-war years in the Lake Plains – where now land shortage is most acute – there was a broad belt of mainly unoccupied, uncultivated bushland, infested with game, extending from the Livingstone Mountains in the east to the Nyasaland border in the south-west. There were extensive, more or less empty areas in almost every chiefdom. The people were subsistence farmers only, and also banana eaters, and in this well-watered country their agricultural requirements were adequately met on very modest holdings, from most of which two harvests a year could be gathered.

In the brief period of little more than ten years the situation has altered radically to the point of a general shortage of land (except for some parts in the north-west), and especially in the Lake Plains the available land is quite insufficient to meet the demands of the inhabitants. This critical change is the result partly of an increasing population, augmented by some immigration from other tribal areas; but more especially it is the result of the demands for larger arable holdings to meet cash crop aspirations – *i.e.*, money earning. Although both coffee and paddy rice cultivation had begun before 1939, and both were encouraged and developed during the War years, it was not until after 1945 that both of these cash crops became well and generally established and the demand for money incomes became universal.

III

It was in order to investigate this new situation, which was beginning to become serious and to cause concern to Government, that I made a sociological survey in 1955. I had already spent some months in the country in 1954 investigating labour migration in order to provide Government with information and to make recommendations to deal with the problems arising. The second period of work occupied about five months. During both enquiries I was extremely fortunate in having the use of the excellent monographs of G. and M. Wilson who had carried out a conventional anthropological study of the Nyakyusa between 1934 and 1938. Without their basic work behind me, neither of my two studies would have been possible in so brief a time, and I must gratefully acknowledge the real value of their writings.

The intention had been that a complete enquiry should be made into Nyakyusa land conditions in all parts of the country, and that it should culminate in a full recording of tribal land law and custom with a view to its possible reform. In the event only the initial enquiry in the field in the Lake Plains was completed and the results of that alone are described in this essay. Whereas in former days there were probably few distinctive differences between the various parts of the country, in modern times with the introduction of different cash crops, with differential population growths and varying demands on the land, important divergences seem to be arising. For example,

10:Gulliver E-5 (1954-1955) 1958 FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa

CHAPTER III

CHANGING CONDITIONS AND THE PRESENT SITUATION

Population

At the African Census in 1948 there were recorded, in their own tribal area, approximately 198,000 Nyakyusa at an average density over the land available for their use of 212 persons per square mile. [161]

In the Lake Plains alone there were, in 1948, 55,700 inhabitants living at an average density of 268 persons per square mile. Population densities in the other Nyakyusa areas were rather lower than this.

These figures do not, however, give the full picture from the point of view of land occupation and use, for large numbers of men, and some women, were at the time of the Census absent from their homes and living temporarily in employment areas abroad – chiefly in the Rhodesias and South Africa. I have estimated elsewhere that approximately 8,000 men would have been away in 1948, of whom 95 per cent. or even more would return to settle down at home, for there was only a very small proportion of men who remained more or less permanently absent. That is to say, these men remained dependent for their land needs on their own tribal territory, and indeed at least some were active land-holders whilst the rest had lesser rights in family holdings. [167]

If, therefore, we include these temporary absentees, the measure of the pressure of population on the land is shown by an average density of population for all Nyakyusa of 220 persons per square mile. At least 3,000 of these migrant labourers (possibly more) had their homes in the Lake Plains, and this number increased the density of population dependent on the land resources of this region to 282 persons per square mile.

The statistically average family in 1948 comprised about five people, and therefore the population density can be restated in the form that for all Nyakyusa there were available about 15 acres of land per family. In the Lake Plains there were about 12 acres of land available. These averages do not, of course, take account of either unusable land such as swamps, steep slopes, infertile tracts, etc., nor of the land necessarily taken up by roads and paths, open spaces in the villages and the like.[1]

These figures indicate that, taking a broad and general view based on averages, the density of Nyakyusa population or their pressure on their tribal lands ranked amongst the highest in Tanganyika in 1948.[2]

Unfortunately census enumerations before 1948 were too unreliable to allow of any satisfactory estimate of the probable rates of population increase, but from general information and internal evidence it is thought not unreasonable to suggest that in the Lake Plains population is increasing perhaps at the rate of one per cent. per annum; and in the rest of the tribal area the annual increase may be one and a half per cent. per annum. The high incidence of malaria and other debilitating diseases in the Lake Plains during the flood period of the wet season each year accounts for the lower estimate of increase there. [114] [169]

1. The amount is taken in these calculations of Nyakyusa who were permanently resident in other parts of the Territory. They lived chiefly in Mbeya District (Unyika, Usafwa and Mbeya Town) where they numbered about 20,000 in 1948.

2. The higher population densities in 1948 were as follows:—Mbeya Island (Ukerewe District) 300, Mbeya 257, Ukerewe 200, Lushoto 170, Rungwe (including Nyakyusa, Ndali, Lambia, Kyela, etc.) 164, Morogoro 146, Arusha 146, Kwimba 140. Figures extracted from *Population Density*, Govt. of Tanganyika, 1955.

10:Gulliver E-5 (1954-1955)1958 FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa

161 If therefore, pending the next Census to be made in 1957, we assume these rates of increase, then by 1955 it may be estimated that the Nyakyusa numbered about 217,000 at an average density of 233 persons per square mile, allowing 13.7 acres of land per family of five. For the Lake Plains alone, the population in 1955 would have been nearly 60,000 at an average density of 287 persons per square mile, with 11.2 acres per family. If we also include the estimated number of absentee migrant labourers in the base year of 1948, then there were in 1955 perhaps 63,000 people dependent on the land resources of the Lake Plains at an average density of 303 per square mile, though in fact some 6,000 men were temporarily absent from home in that year.

The figures and estimates are given in Table I. These averages do, of course, hide some considerable and significant local variations which are further described at pages 14 ff. below.

TABLE I
NYAKYUSA POPULATION

162

	1948 *Census*			1955 *Estimates*		
	a	*b*	*c*	*a*	*b*	*c*
Lake Plains at increase of 1% p.a.	55,700	268	11.9	59,700	287	11.2
Central Region at increase of 1½% p.a.	48,500	224	14.2	53,800	248	12.9
N.E. Highlands at increase of 1½% p.a.	40,300	183	17.4	44,700	203	15.8
N.W. Highlands at increase of 1½% p.a.	53,200	185	17.3	59,000	205	15.6
NYAKYUSA in tribal area	197,700	212	15.2	217,200	233	13.7

a = population
b = persons per square mile on land available for African use.
c = average acreage available per family of 5 persons.

Assuming that there were in 1948 about 3,000 men temporarily absent from their homes in the Lake Plains but who remained dependent on the land resources of that region, then the following estimate may be made:–

Lake Plains – persons resident at home and temporarily abroad:–

a	*b*	*c*	*a*	*b*	*c*
58,700	282	11.3	62,935	303	10.6

The approximate areas available for African use in the tribal lands (excluding alienated land, forest reserves and main roads) are:–

Lake Plains – 208 sq. miles N.E. Highlands – 220 sq. miles
Central Region – 217 sq. miles N.W. Highlands – 288 sq. miles
BuNyakyusa – 933 sq. miles

In these calculations no account is taken of unusable land such as swamps, steep slopes, thicket, etc.

Cash Cropping: Paddy Cultivation

933 932 This condition of a high density of population exists in a modern economy in which cash-cropping is universally accepted and desired. Under the former subsistence agriculture, because of heavy rainfall and natural annual flooding, quite small-sized holdings were adequate to satisfy a family's food requirements. Two harvests a year are easily obtained in some 241 combination of maize, beans, groundnuts and finger millet, with a few small "luxury" crops; and the banana groves yield continuously. The Nyakyusa were and are extremely fortunate in their food supply, and seldom experience shortages such as occasionally or even commonly afflict many peoples of East Africa.

243 [1491] Rice was first introduced in 1896 by two chiefs who obtained the seed from Nyasaland Acabo; and in 1898 the Moravian Mission and a Swahili

10:Gulliver E-5 (1954-1955)1958 FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa

less uncultivated. These areas can easily be picked out today by the absence of village sites and banana groves. There was something of a rush to grab land in such areas and in the less densely populated parts of the chiefdoms. Today in my personal experience – for no general survey has been attempted – there remains little or no unused land within the paddy-growing region which can, by native techniques, be brought under the plough; and indeed men are attempting to grow paddy on unsuitably raised land where inundation is inadequate. Communal cattle pastures have shrunk as arable holdings extended until they remain only where cultivation is profitless.

The demand for land has far outrun the physical supply, and in 1955 it still seemed to be insatiable. The initial cycle was that a desire for more money to permit of a higher standard of living created a demand for more land on which to produce more cash crops; but the increased level of income then further stimulated money demands to raise standards higher again, thus bringing a renewed demand for land. The cycle has now been halted by the lack of further land to meet the people's needs, but the demand remains nevertheless and is indeed increased by rising costs of living.

This economic picture is, of course, oversimplified, but it may serve to illustrate the nature of forces at work in the situation. I would not wish to overemphasise the snowball effect, for the bulk of the population remains still largely content with only a little over earlier standards; but increasing numbers of men and their families are coming to seek something better. Bicycles have become something of a general necessity; a variety of good clothing and shoes is considered quite essential. Only a single decade before the Nyakyusa women still generally went about in the traditional nudity, whereas in 1955 they must have ranked among the very best-dressed African women in the Territory. European-type household goods, crockery and utensils are common. The demand for money, that is for a higher standard of living, has also been greatly stimulated by the experiences of the thousands of labour migrants returning from southern towns and mines, and by the cash and goods they bring back with them.[1]

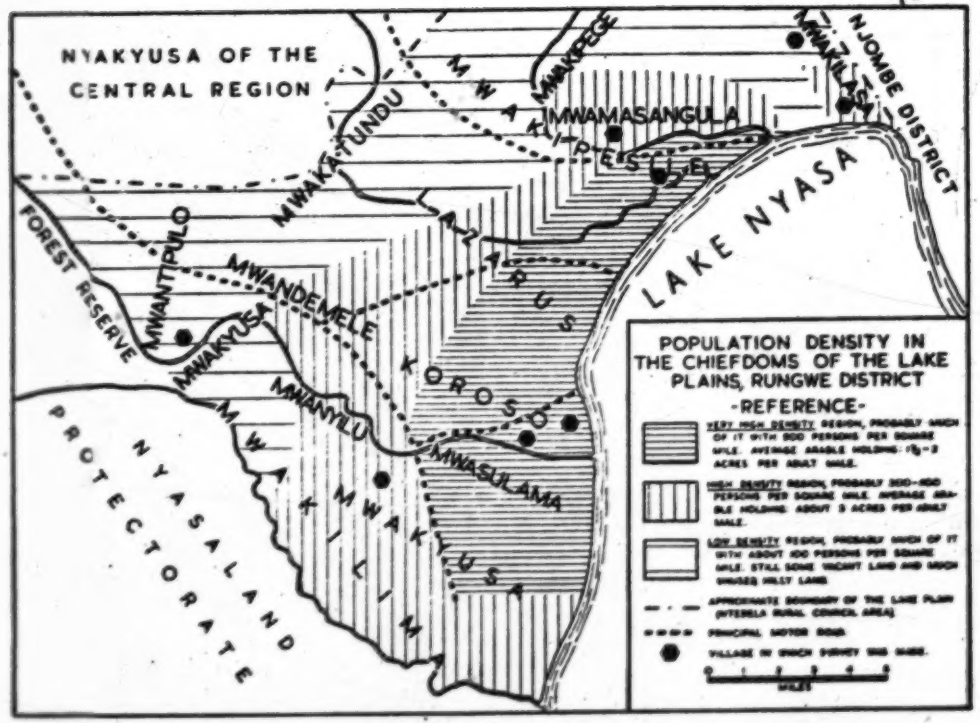
It is not possible for me to attempt to suggest what a desirable acreage would be for a contemporary Nyakyusa, because money demands, crop yields and selling prices change and the desire for higher standards of living also alter as the potentialities of the new cash economy are increasingly understood. In 1954 the approximate average of Sh.200/- per paddy cultivator was earned from perhaps two or three acres of arable land, but an indeterminable amount of the crop was kept back for home food requirements. As will be shown later many men's paddy fields could have been little more than an acre, and many men, specifically young men, had no paddy land at all. Certainly there were few who held what they considered, at a reasonable estimate, to be sufficient land.

This universal cash crop agriculture and the continuing demand for higher standards of living, and therefore for higher money incomes, is the real cause of the new and rather sudden pressure of population on the land. Of course this economic process operates within a situation of relatively dense population and in a peasant community where land is almost the only form of capital and alternative enterprise is small. The gradual increase of population, although probably small, further aggravates the difficult situation.

Arable Holdings

It was not possible to obtain adequate, satisfactory data to allow the calculation of local population densities, and the detailed results of the 1948

1. In Gulliver, P. H., 1957, an estimate of the cash income of Nyakyusa in 1954 is given at pp. 31-2. Data on the cash brought back by returning labour migrants are given at p. 35.


NYAKYUSA OF THE
CENTRAL REGION
MWAKATUNDU
MWAKIPESULE
MWAKIPEGE
IMWAMASANGULA
MWAKILASI
NJOMBE DISTRICT
LAKE NYASA
LAZARUS
MWANDEMELE
KOROSO
MWASULAMA
MWAKYUSA
MWANYILU
MWAKILIM
MWANTIPULO
MWAKYUSA
FOREST RESERVE
NYASALAND
PROTECTORATE
POPULATION DENSITY IN
THE CHIEFDOMS OF THE LAKE
PLAINS, RUNGWE DISTRICT
-REFERENCE-
VERY HIGH DENSITY REGION, PROBABLY MUCH OF IT WITH 500 PERSONS PER SQUARE MILE. AVERAGE ARABLE HOLDING: 1½-3 ACRES PER ADULT MALE.
HIGH DENSITY REGION, PROBABLY 300-400 PERSONS PER SQUARE MILE. AVERAGE ARABLE HOLDING: ABOUT 3 ACRES PER ADULT MALE.
LOW DENSITY REGION, PROBABLY MUCH OF IT WITH ABOUT 100 PERSONS PER SQUARE MILE. STILL SOME VACANT LAND AND MUCH UNUSED VALLEY LAND.
APPROXIMATE BOUNDARY OF THE LAKE PLAIN (INTERELA RURAL COUNCIL AREA)
PRINCIPAL MOTOR ROAD
VILLAGE IN WHICH FURNEY WAS MADE.
0 1 2 3 4 5
MILES

[Facing p. 15]

10:Gulliver E-5 (1954-1955) 1958 FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa

Census have never been issued.[1] However in some sample villages I very roughly measured arable holdings, and my results provide new information even though they can be illustrative only of the modern situation.

In each of the eight villages chosen[2] the arable holdings of *all* the adult male members (whether at home or away at work at the time) of the whole village, or occasionally of a distinct section of it, were measured by the simple and rough method of pacing the borders of every separate plot and converting the resultant figures into yards and thus to acreages. The actual pacing was done entirely by myself in order to try to maintain an even stride on all occasions, but in each village I was well supported by a team of four or five villagers, always including the headman and his assistants. The figures obtained relate only to arable holdings and bear no determinate relation either to crop yields or to non-arable land in the villages concerned. The results are summarised in Table III below.

TABLE III
ARABLE HOLDINGS IN EIGHT VILLAGES

Village and chiefdom	*No. of land-holders*	*Average holding in acres*	*No. of men holding more than:—* 5 *acres*	10 *acres*	*Average size of plots in acres*
Kapugi					
Mwamasangula ..	59	3.2	11	1	1
Ikolo Mwakyusa ..	68	3.0	13	0	1.2
Matema Mwakilasa	50	1.9	4	1	0.6
Lugombo Koroso ..	24	1.6	2	0	0.6
Mpunguti					
Mwakipesile ..	63	1.5	1	0	0.5
Kapugi Koroso ..	60	1.3	1	0	0.4
Lusonjo Mwakilasa	12	1.3	0	0	0.6
Busoka Mwantipulo	36	1.0	0	0	0.4
	372 men		32 men (8.6%)	2 men	

From this Table it can be seen that in the chiefdoms of Koroso and Mwakipesile, *in the villages concerned*, the average holding per man was about one and a half acres – and my impression was that in the southern parts of Lazarus's chiefdom and elsewhere immediately surrounding the lake shore similar conditions existed. It may be noted too that in these cases there were large numbers of young men without holdings at all. On the other hand, in the selected villages in the chiefdoms of Mwamasangula and Mwakyusa, *the average holdings were about twice as large – three acres;* and fewer young men were landless. Note also the cases of the villages in the chiefdoms of Mwantipulo and Mwakilasa in the more northerly parts of the Lake Plains, where the average holdings were one and 1.3 acres respectively, and where yet there was arable land unused and available. In those parts paddy cultivation is very limited because of the higher and hilly country, and the people remain little more than subsistence farmers – perhaps they may be taken as not unlike the traditional, pre-European subsistence cultivators.

Unfortunately I am unable to relate these figues of arable holdings to the total land available in each village, for this would have required survey work beyond my competence. Non-arable land is utilised for village sites with banana groves, roads and paths, pasturage, etc.; but the position is further complicated by varying amounts of unusable land in my sample villages. To give only two examples: within the boundaries of Mpunguti village, Mwakipesile's chiefdom, there are many acres of land adjacent to the Mbaka river which today are unusable because of deep flooding from

1. Population figures of any kind are not available even for the separate chiefdoms, let alone for ecological areas.
2. Their approximate locations are indicated on the accompanying sketch-map.

311 the river in spate during the wet season, although here and there a few plots
[133] are cultivated on slightly raised ground. Similarly in Kapugi village, Koroso's chiefdom, some parts are heavily inundated by the Kiwira river. In both these cases flooding has made unusable ground which was cultivated and even built on a generation ago; the degree of annual flooding seems to be decreasing again now so that very slowly a certain amount of new land is becoming available. This cyclical change appears to be directly connected with the long-term rise and fall of the level of Lake Nyasa. On the other hand, in more fortunate villages such as Ikolo, Mwakyusa's chiefdom, and Kapugi, Mwamasangula's chiefdom, there is rather more common pasturage remaining, and village sites, paths, etc., are noticeably less restricted.

The following arithmetical observations may be noted as permitting, perhaps, some guide to population densities in the Lake Plains:-

[161]

Persons per sq. mile	*Total acreage per family of five*	*Arable holding per family of five if proportion of total land under arable holdings is:—*	
		one-third	*two-fifths*
300	10.7	3.6	4.3
400	8	2.7	3.2
500	6.4	2.1	2.6
600	5.3	1.8	2.1

(N.B. The statistically average family is composed of five people)

It has been suggested by the Agricultural Field Officer, Tukuyu, that for the whole of Rungwe District perhaps 30 per cent. of all land is under cultivation. He was not prepared to place any reliance on this figure, and certainly for the Lake Plains it must be higher.

To summarise my own tentative conclusions and in order to obtain
311 some kind of picture of the current land situation, I suggest the following division into regions:-
134 A. The flood plains proper
161 1. **Very high-density region** – the arable land available under present conditions amounts to about 1½-2 acres per adult male and the local density of population is probably in the region of 500 persons per square mile: – in most of the chiefdoms of Mwasulama, Koroso and Lazarus, the south-eastern part of Mwakipesile's and the eastern part of Mwakyusa's chiefdoms.

2. **High-density region** – there is available about 3 acres of arable land per adult male and the local density of population is between 300 and 400 persons per square mile: – in the chiefdoms of Mwamasangula, Mwanyilu and Mwakilima, the southern part of Mwakilasa's, the centre of Mwakyusa's and much of Mwandemele's chiefdoms.

B. The remainder of the Lake Plains (Ntebela)

3. **Low-density region** – here there remains much vacant land (some usable, some scarcely usable) and population density is probably little over 100 persons per square mile, and even lower than that in the most northerly parts: – the northern, higher areas comprising the north of Mwakyusa's (Mwisula's) chiefdom, the remainder of Mwandemele's, the whole of Mwantipulo's, Mwakatundu's and Mwakipege's chiefdoms, together with the northern part of Mwakipesile's and of Mwakilasa's chiefdoms.

This summary description is, and can be, only very approximate, taking no account of the complexity of local variations to be seen on the ground. It is illustrated in the accompanying sketch-map.

It may be emphasised that in the two high-density regions practically all available land is in use. In the "high-density region" (No. 2 above) it
[341] may be possible to reduce slightly the non-productive areas taken up by
[245] village sites, but nowhere will this be easy or even desirable, and already most of the vacant spaces between houses are packed with banana groves, small

plots of maize, squashes, tobacco, etc., and useful trees (bamboo, citrus, mango, kapok, *usyunguti* and firewood). Artificial drainage would, of course, make more land available along the rivers, but this is in general beyond the abilities and resources of the Nyakyusa without considerable outside assistance.

Finally, in this matter it is to be remembered that in addition to a man's arable holding, each of his wives has a banana plot at her house from which she obtains her staple foodstuff. Such plots amount to perhaps about a tenth of an acre on the average. On the other hand, the Nyakyusa are no longer prepared to tolerate a predominantly banana diet. Rice has, in most areas of the Lake Plains, become almost as important as bananas.

Large-sized Holdings

Some blame for this novel shortage of land and the smallness of the average holding has often been laid upon that minority of Nyakyusa who have exceptionally large holdings, and also upon the immigrants from beyond the Lake Plains who have come to settle there during the past decade.

The occupiers of large-sized holdings are rather fewer than has sometimes been supposed. The notoriety of large land-owners, such as some of the modern chiefs with as much as 25-30 acres, has brought more attention to them than is really warranted. Most chiefs and village headmen have arable holdings of above average size, as a result of their privileged positions in the land allocation system and because of their prestige influence; but they remain a small minority and their number is bound to decrease in the future as inheritance causes sub-division of their holdings, for most of them have also more than the average number of wives and sons. In the two high-density regions it is clearly impossible for any man much to increase his present holding. As will be shown later (see page 24) the modern trend is not unnaturally towards a dangerous fragmentation of holdings.

The data obtained in this matter for my eight village samples are summarised in Table III, page 15. In those villages the two men out of 372 who held more than ten acres were a village headman and the father of a chief.[1] There were seven other headmen and one chief as well as some other locally influential men amongst the people covered by my surveys, but none of them held more than ten acres. There are, of course, some commoners amongst the large land-holders; many of them are close relatives of the chief or headman and have thus received preferential treatment. Some, however, are ordinary villagers who were perspicacious enough to see future trends and to obtain land in the early days before most men realised its new value and when vacant areas were still easily available. Such men are tending to become a new, wealthy class, but on the other hand they are particularly susceptible to the begging of kinsmen and friends who have insufficient land. If they are not to be regarded as unneighbourly or even anti-social (perhaps practising witchcraft) they are virtually compelled to be generous sometimes, both with their land and with their profits.

On the whole this minority of men excites little attention or jealousy among the Nyakyusa, who indeed take it for granted that their chiefs and headmen will have more land than ordinary villagers, as befits their status and prestige. If it be thought that by reducing somehow the size and number of these unusually large holdings then the land shortage might be partly relieved, it is a false hope. I scarcely think that the Nyakyusa would welcome any such attempt at interference by administrative action, but in any case it would only provide minor and temporary relief here and there and would not be worth the executive difficulties involved.

1. This second man should be a chief himself but he was dismissed by Government on his imprisonment for peculation. He still holds much of the prestige and privilege of a chief for his son is only allowed authority in purely local government affairs.

10:Gulliver E-5 (1954-1955)1958 FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa

423 all. Field boundaries have lost their earlier fluidity, when a plenty of land did not call for precise demarcation, and the only important changes now result from the land being left vacant or by the internal division of established holdings by inheritance or anticipatory inheritance.

In brief, then, the high premium given to land because of its modern scarcity value, and the enhanced authority of the headman in land affairs act together to preserve the individual's rights. The residual rights of the village, as group-owner of all land within the village boundary, do not affect the land-holder during his continued residence there.

[428] [598] The commonest type of dispute in land matters arises in inheritance, where a younger brother sues his senior in order to obtain or increase his share of the paternal holding (see page 21). That is to say, in general only where established holdings are being broken up does dispute arise and then, of course, only between the sons of the dead man. Disputes between neighbours in a village seldom are grave enough to be brought to court or even before the headman.

[593] There are also many petty, semi-domestic cases which faithfully reflect the frequently poor relations between Nyakyusa husbands and wives in modern times.[1]

TABLE IV

NYAKYUSA LAND DISPUTES: CIVIL CASES, 1954

691 423 [161]

			No. of civil cases	*Land cases* No.	*Land cases* %	*Population per land case*	*Density of population*
Lake Plains ..	..	..	1,877	104	5	567	285
N.E. Highlands	..	..	963	24	2.5	1,842	199
Central Region	..	..	901	13	1.5	4,092	245
N.W. Highlands	..	..	1,300	8	0.6	7,300	201

Based on returns of civil cases in local courts of first instance ('B' Courts) for 1954. In 1955 the percentages were almost exactly the same as in 1954.

Several interesting points are suggested by these figures. Firstly, there is the larger proportion of land cases and the much smaller population per case in the Lake Plains, where land shortage is worst in relation to local demand, not only because of the higher density of population as such, but also because of the relatively larger acreages required for paddy cultivation. Secondly, in the Central Region of Nyakyusa country there is also a high density of population, but nevertheless only a few land cases; this may be attributed to the absence of cash-cropping and the absence, therefore, of a keen demand for land. On the other hand, the relatively numerous cases, or small population per case, in the north-eastern Highlands seem to result directly from a particularly densely populated area (Mwakaleli) where coffee cultivation is long established and the demand for land is exceptionally keen. In other words, as far as the figures for 1954 and 1955 show, there is a direct connection between land scarcity and the incidence of land disputes before the local courts (i.e. the more intractable disputes which go beyond the village headmen). General observation supports this conclusion. It may be expected in the future, therefore, that such cases will increase unless administrative action is taken to rationalise the inheritance laws with a view to minimising the area of potential disagreement amongst the sons of a deceased man.

691 423 191 For comparative interest, in so far as they offer some indication, I append here data on other Districts in the Territory where land disputes are common.

1. In 1954, 40 per cent. of all civil cases in the lower courts were marital disputes, including divorce suits, and there was one divorce case for every 50 adult males living in the country in that year.

10:Gulliver E-5 (1954-1955) 1958 FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Briefly to summarise the contemporary land situation: in the Lake Plains it may be said that in the main the traditional land tenure system and land law still continue as the basis of native land holding today. The essential feature in recent years has been the acute land shortage in relation to arable needs under the current system of agriculture. Village unity and village exclusiveness have been increased and so also has the authority of the village headman in his control and allocation of land rights. Security of tenure has been strengthened, if anything, and one of the most important methods of obtaining land is now by inheritance. The new law establishing inheritance from father to sons, whilst generally acceptable to the people, is producing a number of civil suits which form the greatest proportion of the more important land cases before the local courts.

The shortage of land is principally the result of increased demands for paddy (i.e. cash crop) cultivation, although the population appears to be increasing slowly. In the high density regions almost all men have considerably less land than they could cultivate, especially under the impetus of the ox-plough, with the developing desires for money income. In the low density region of the low foothills there is still some vacant or partly utilised land, though of very inferior quality for paddy cultivation. The shortage hits the younger men severely, and many of them cannot obtain land at all until the death or senility of their fathers. Fragmentation and dispersion of holdings is rapidly becoming serious and without check.

The first question which arises is whether anything can be done to ease the pressure of population on the country by making more land available, or by making its distribution more equitable.

The thinly populated parts of the northern region of the Lake Plains offer a meagre solution only, for the country is raised above the level of the flood plains and is often broken and hilly. Fertility is low, erosion is a constant danger and the paddy yield (if obtainable at all) is poor. Nyakyusa from the densely populated areas to south and east are therefore most unwilling to move there. In any case the available land, which remains safely and economically open to cultivation, is filling up fairly quickly – mainly by immigration. Certainly I do not think that it can supply sufficient space to meet modern needs. There is, however, no reason why immigrants should make a difficult situation worse, and therefore it is suggested that further immigration from outside the Lake Plains should be carefully controlled if not altogether prevented. Indubitably outsiders (almost entirely Nyakyusa from the Highlands) who hold land without permanent residence should be prohibited and their holdings reallocated to local inhabitants.

As I have already indicated (page 17), I do not think that the problem of men who hold unusually large acreages is particularly serious. Such large holdings are relatively few and will be inevitably split up by inheritance on the deaths of the present occupiers.

In the flood plains proper there is, as far as I am aware, extremely little new land which could be brought under cultivation. Mechanical assistance in the clearance of dense reed thicket[1] and in drainage schemes would produce

1. These areas of thicket are heavily inundated in the wet season but, if cleared, could be used for a dry season crop.

10:Gulliver E-5 (1954-1955) 1958 FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa

NOTE

THE 1957 POPULATION CENSUS

Since this Report was originally written there has been a new census of the African population in Tanganyika. This took place in August, 1957, and the first official results have been published by the East African Statistical Department in *Tanganyika African Population Census, 1957. Analysis by sex and age for Province, District and Territorial Census Areas*, March, 1958.

In this note are given these latest data relevant to the subject matter of this report. The following Table is set out in the same form as Table I on page 12 in which my original estimates were given. As in that Table, so here, no account is taken of unusable land such as swamp, steep slopes, thicket, etc., in the calculation of densities and available acreages.

NYAKYUSA POPULATION

	1948 *Population*	1957 *Population*	1957 *Density per sq. mile*	1957 *Acres per family of 5*	*Average annual* increase 1948-57
Lake Plains ..	55,700	66,513	330	10.0	3.0%
Central Region ..	48,300	48,305	223	14.3	0.0%
N. W. Highlands	53,200	65,075	236	14.2	2.5%
N. E. Highlands ..	40,300	44,097	203	15.8	1.2%
NYAKYUSA in tribal area ..	197,700	224,590	241	13.3	1.4%

N.B. There are some members of other tribes in the Nyakyusa tribal area who cannot be excluded from these figures.

Assuming that in 1957 there were about 6,000 men temporarily absent from their homes in the Lake Plains but who remained dependent on the land resources of that region, then the following estimate may be made:—

Lake Plains – persons resident at home and temporarily abroad:—

58,700	72,513	349	9.2

The changes in population during this nine-year period, in so far as they are indicated by the results of these two censuses, differ a little from what was suggested in Chapter III. Improved enumeration may well account for some of the increase; but, apart from such mechanical errors, it is clear that there has been a relatively large increase of population in the Lake Plains, and in the North-Western Highlands. I suggest that the natural increase in the Lake Plains has been 1-1½ per cent. a year, and the remaining increase has come from immigration (cf. pages 18 ff). The same is probably true for the North-Western Highlands where immigration has occurred because some land remained in that region which could still be taken up (unlike other parts of the country). It is noteworthy that the population of the relatively poor Central Region, which has no cash crop and easily eroded land, has remained the same at the end of the period. Undoubtedly there has been emigration from this region to the Lake Plains and the North-Western Highlands.

As far as this report is concerned, the population has been increasing more rapidly and the density is greater than my original figures indicated. I am inclined to think now that the population of the "very high density" region of the Lake Plains (page 16) must be well over 300 people per square mile – probably up to 600 people per square mile. Pressure on the land is, therefore, more acute than I reported, and the pressure on the social system of the Nyakyusa is similarly greater. This does not affect the main analysis and argument of the report.

May, 1958.

11:Thwaites C-5 (ca. 1962) 1964
FN17 Ngonde FN17
Nyakyusa

[P.236 A]

WANYAKYUSA AGRICULTURE

By D. H. [illegible], Agricultural Assistant, Tanganyika Territory

131 The Wanyakyusa occupy the District of Rungwe in the Southern Highlands Province. The district lies between 9° and 9½° S. latitude at the northern tip of Lake Nyasa. The altitude
133 ranges from 1,500 feet to 9,500 feet. The district is divided into twelve chiefdoms. The
631 Administrative Headquarters are at Tukuyu, which was known before the British occupation as Neu Langenberg.

Inhabitants

The local people are not indigenous to this
101 area. They came, tradition has it, from
[173] Mahenge via Ukinga after many tribal fights. They are akin to the Wahenga in Nyasaland bordering on the Tanganyika boundary. It is
191 estimated that only 10 per cent of the Wanyakyusa speak Kiswahili. According to the 1935
161 census the total population was 153,204. The
162 total number of tax-payers in 1942 was 35,304, or 23.04 per cent of the total population.

181 The people themselves are extremely industrious and intelligent. As there are 90 people to the square mile, living conditions are
105 crowded and emigration is continually taking place. The people are partial to litigation over cattle and women. The number of cases heard annually in the Native Courts is about 6,000. There is no one historical and traditional head of the tribe. The twelve Chiefs are, in reality, hereditary Headmen who have been selected by Government to be Chiefs. They are in effect only *primi inter pares* in native eyes, the outlook of the people being unusually democratic for a native tribe.

105 The people live in houses made of wattle and daub or bamboo frame, with thatched
342 roof, and villages are sited mostly along ridges.
361 Rectangular houses are now built instead of the round huts of former days. They often stand in rows with a main street down the middle with bananas in the background. The more progressive natives build with sun-dried or burnt brick. Stock are stalled in the same house owing to the prevalence of thieving, but sleep in separate rooms.

Climate

132 The rainfall of the district varies in the different areas. In Tukuyu itself the annual average for 25 years (1918-1942) is 100.22 inches. On the Lake shore the average is probably higher, but no continuous statistics are available. The heaviest rainfall months are from December to May, but, in most years,